

One Work: Yolanda López's "Tableaux Vivant"

Yolanda López's "Tableaux Vivant" series (1978) makes up twelve color photos illustrating the artist as a girl using running shorts and tennis shoes, embracing numerous presents: smiling toothily while thrusting one fist in the air and clutching a package of paintbrushes in the other; standing in coy contrapposto with her head cocked to one side, left hand resting on her hip and right arm displaying the brushes; or lunging forward, wielding the brushes like a sword. This renowned operate in López's oeuvre, on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, likewise places the artist as a saint: she stands in front of a body-height, hand-painted mandorla, while at her feet is a makeshift altar of daily items organized on a standard Mexican blanket, amongst them a potted plant, a ceramic container, a Wonder Woman comics, little American and Mexican flags, a pomegranate, a vase of flowers, and— most considerably— a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, along with a red prayer candle light devoted to her, and a picture of the associated Aztec fertility goddess Tonantzin.

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An effective sign of womanhood in Mexican culture, the Virgin of Guadalupe is generally illustrated as a simple and passive Mary, preserved in a halo of light with her head bowed, eyes downcast, and hands in reflective prayer. By contrast, López appears happy and active as a modern-Chicana-as-Virgin, surrounded by signs developing that she is a feminist, artist, and professional athlete. An example of efficiency for the cam, a category artists engaged specifically in the 1960 s and '70 s to dabble gender functions and identities, the series reveals López beginning to explore her own often inconsistent identities: standard Mexican American culture was not constantly congenial to feminist concepts, and second-wave U.S. feminism in some cases omitted females of color. López experienced those stress throughout her life; certainly, this is her very first solo museum exhibit, and it opened simply one month after her death at the age of 78 Her long, significant profession progressed from this lively seed.

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